The Art of Healing Ourselves

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Good Morning Dear Friends,

Today is the thirtieth of July, 1996 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Today is also the full moon day. Tonight I hope that the full moon will be there for all of us. If the sky is clear, I will be happy to invite you to sit with me on the platform of my hut under the moon.

We have been talking to the children about the twenty-first century. We want to prepare ourselves to be ready for the twenty-first century. We have been talking about how to make our home comfortable for the twenty-first century. We talked about a room in which we can practice peace, reconciliation with ourselves, where we can restore ourselves, where we can take refuge. We talked about a local park taken care of by twenty or thirty houses. We discussed how to make that park into a center of peace and joy for children and for adults.

I would like to continue, because it is our duty to practice looking deeply in order to make life more pleasant for ourselves and for those we love. I want to talk about a day of mindfulness—a day for each family and from time to time, for many families at the same time.

In Plum Village we have been doing things that are very exciting. We are preparing the chanting book for the twenty-first century. We have nearly finished it. We will have it printed just two years before the twenty-first century. We have also prepared a book of practice for the young novice of the twenty-first century. We have been preparing a lot and we do it with a lot of joy. So this matter of taking care of the twenty-first century, it has to be the job of everyone because we only have four years before the new century starts. And we have decided to climb the hill of the twenty-first century together in peace, with a lot of happiness.

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One of the things we have talked about concerning the preparation for the new century is how to handle our garbage. Because during this twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, a lot of suffering. We have created a lot of war, created a lot of suffering, a lot of discrimination, a lot of death. If we don't know how to take care of that garbage, the twenty-first century will not be pleasant. And we have only four years left to take care of our garbage. How to pile it up, how to transform it into compost, so that the flowers of the twenty-first century would have a chance to bloom? This is a big job and we have to do it together. We have to come together and practice looking deeply concerning how to handle the garbage we have produced. One person cannot do much.

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Personally, I want the twenty-first century to be called the century of love. Because we desperately need love. The kind of love that will not produce suffering. There is a Buddha that is supposed to be born to us. His name is Maitreya. Maitri means love. So, Maitreya means Mr. Love. In order to prepare for that Buddha to come, we need time. We need to coordinate our efforts. Several times I have said that the new Buddha may not be in the form of one person. The new Buddha may take the form of a Sangha. The Sangha means community, community of

practice. Naturally I myself and all my friends are working hard in order for the Buddha to come in the form of the community, Buddha as a Sangha.

The first element of love is *maitri*, the willingness to bring happiness to the person we love, the people we love, and therefore to ourselves. Because we know that if the other person is happy then we will be happy also. The Buddha said when you wake up in the morning you ask yourself this question, "What can I do today to make my Sangha happy?" This is a good practice. What can I do today to make him happy? What can I do today to make her happy? What can I do today to make them happy? To make my Sangha happy? That is the first question we have to ask in the morning.

I would like to say something about this question. Because I think that to do something may bring happiness, but just to not do something is equally important. If you are able to refrain from doing something you can make many people happy. So the question might be put like this, "What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy?" Because in our daily life we might do things that make our beloved one suffer. Therefore just not to do it is good enough to make them happy. What can I do today to make the Sangha happy? What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy? This is a very good question. You have the willingness to love and to make people happy. You know that you'll be happy if the other people are happy. No one questions your good will—you really want to love, you want to make people happy. So, you want to make it not only a wish but a reality. So you try to do something, or you try to not do something, in order for happiness to be possible.

The day of mindfulness we organize each week in our family may be a very good opportunity for us to learn to do this. A day of mindfulness is like a breathing room in our home. It's something that a civilized family should practice. In the old time, people didn't work on Sunday—I hope they still practice that. Sunday is not the day for you to work. In Plum Village we call Saturday "lazy day." To be lazy, that's not easy. You have to learn how to do it. On lazy days I used to ask people this question: "Dear friend, are you lazy enough?" To practice a lazy day is not easy, therefore we have to support each other in making it a real lazy day. Because we have the tendency to work hard, to be busy. A day of mindfulness, or maybe half a day of mindfulness, is what we have to do to increase the happiness in our family, in our society.

The question is how to organize that half-day or day of mindfulness so that everyone can enjoy it. It should not be hard practice. Because I don't really like the word "hard" practice or "intensive" practice—I don't know what it means, "intensive practice of meditation." When I drink a glass of water in mindfulness, I practice mindfulness of drinking, and I get a lot of joy and peace during the time of drinking a glass of water. But can I drink my glass of water intensively? No. It does not mean anything to me. To drink water you just drink it with mindfulness. The more you are mindful, the more the drinking becomes a pleasure. The problem is whether you drink it in mindfulness or not. The problem is not whether you drink it intensively or not intensively. The same thing is true with walking meditation. If you walk with mindfulness, your steps will bring you a lot of joy and peace. If you don't, then there's no joy and peace. It is not a matter of being intensive or not intensive.

So we need the intelligence of everyone in the family to make the day of mindfulness a very pleasant day. And a day of mindfulness, according to me, is a day when we practice what we can do for the happiness of our beloved ones. It is very crucial that everyone in the family, everyone in the community, practices together; otherwise it would be very difficult. Imagine a family of five people. Only one person wants to practice mindfulness. It is possible, but it is extremely difficult. So, if you are in a family where everyone agrees on the practice of a day of mindfulness, you are a very lucky person. And you have to use all your intelligence. You have to tell your father, your mother, your brothers and your sisters, how you would like to organize a day of mindfulness. I repeat, a day of mindfulness a week is something very civilized. Because we know that without peace, without calm, happiness would not be possible.

A day of mindfulness is a time when we practice and enjoy peace. Enjoy calm. Enjoy communication. It is not because you can talk a lot that you can communicate. It is because you are peaceful, calm—you have the capacity to listen deeply to the other person—that you can communicate. Therefore, in the day of mindfulness you don't talk much. You practice listening deeply with your calm, with your peace and everyone is like that. That does not mean that joy will be diminished. In a day of mindfulness, even when people don't talk a lot to each other, they communicate more with each other by many ways. It can be a very joyful and happy day. I think you will all agree with me that the lazy day each week here is a very nice day. Although we practice silence, this silence is very helpful. It helps communication. It is not oppressive.

What can I do to make the people I love happy? That is our practice in the day of mindfulness. To me, to make another person happy you have to practice being there. To practice being there that is the essence of Buddhist meditation. But perhaps during the week you are not there with the people you love. You are always absent, even if you are eating with them or watching television with them. You are not really there for them. You have not made your presence true and available to the people you love. To me to love means to be there for the person you love. It is very simple, but it is a very deep practice. In Buddhist meditation we learn how to breathe, how to walk, how to smile so that we be there entirely with our true presence, because that is the most precious thing that we can give to the people we love. When you go to your mother and you sit quietly close to her, and you look at her and you say, "Mommy, I am really here for you," you are practicing meditation, because you are truly there with the person you love.

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The day of mindfulness therefore must be a day where members of the same family have to be really there for each other. That is the principle. How to do it? I rely on you to tell me. So we need to sit together and discover. The television companies who publicize their products say, "We bring people together." They mean that things like videotapes and television programs bring people together. I don't believe this much because, as I see it, people who spend the day apart from each other and come home very tired don't have time to be with each other. They turn on the television set and just get lost in that. So television does not bring people together.

What then can bring people together? I think a day of mindfulness. They practice being there for each other. This is very important. This is a kind of answer to the suffering of our time—to practice being there for ourselves and for the people we love; it is very important. In a meditation center like Plum Village we should learn methods of producing our true presence for ourselves and for the people we love. Practice mindful breathing. Practice quiet sitting, smiling. Practice walking meditation. Practice drinking a glass of water in mindfulness. Practice eating your lunch in mindfulness. All these are to produce your true presence. It is very important. Because that is the essence of love, to be there, available, for the people you love.

What can I do to make them happy? We're talking about what we can do. But we don't talk about how we can be. To do maybe is less important than to be. To be there, fresh and calm and loving. I think that is the foundation of love. What you can do is just of secondary importance. Therefore, to be there—calm, loving, fresh, is a very important practice. If meditation cannot help you to be there, to be calm, to be fresh for your beloved one, don't practice meditation. It does not help. So practice meditation in such a way that you can be there really, with some calm, some peace, some freshness, and you know that your meditation practice is good meditation, good practice. That is the whole process of learning. If you have succeeded to some extent, you tell your brother and sister how you have done meditation—that you become more quiet, more released from your suffering, more present for your beloved one. I think that my discussion has to be focused on these practical methods.

I trust that you know how to share breakfast together in mindfulness, in joy. I know that there are people in the morning before starting off to work who eat their breakfast like everyone else. But, they don't practice being there for the people who will be also away for the day. And whom they cannot see for many hours, maybe eight or ten hours. Instead of drinking their tea or their coffee mindfully and smiling to that person sitting across the table, they hold a newspaper like this and hide themselves behind the piece of paper. It is not very wise. It's not very nice. So in a day of mindfulness we won't do things like that. We won't turn our television set on. We turn everything off, except one thing, our presence.

We turn our presence on, and beginning in the morning, when we wake up, we think: "What can I do to make them happy? What should I refrain from doing in order to make them happy?" Please answer these questions in detail, then you will know how to organize a beautiful day of mindfulness. Having breakfast together, that is an art. How to prepare your breakfast and how to sit down and enjoy breakfast together, I need many sessions of Dharma discussions in order to find it out. We would profit a lot from your collective deep looking, your knowledge, your experience about how to organize a breakfast where joy and peace and love can be possible. Give us a Dharma talk, give us a report, give us a Dharma discussion that helps us to learn how to do it. There are those of us who prepare our breakfast while following our in-breath and our out-breath, smiling to the bread, the milk, the muesli, and so on, and who are full of love in the heart. "I am making this breakfast for my Sangha. I am nourishing my Sangha because my Sangha is my body, the Sangha body." Even if the other brothers and sisters don’t contribute to making the breakfast, I would not be angry because I am preparing breakfast with love. So there’s no jealousy, there’s no rancor in my heart. During the time I prepare my breakfast, I am nourished with love. My Sangha is me,

my Sangha is my body, therefore I prepare my breakfast with joy.

You may like to make a little bit of preparation beforehand. Tomorrow will be the day of mindfulness. Today you might already enjoy making a few preparations so that tomorrow would be wonderful. Maybe a few flowers for tomorrow, maybe a special tablecloth, maybe a loaf of special bread for tomorrow. You are motivated by the idea, by the desire, to be happy and to make your beloved one happy. Eating breakfast in such a way that happiness and love can be present. Then you may enjoy walking meditation in a park or just in the front yard. Everyone in the family should know how to walk in order to generate peace and joy and togetherness by walking. You don't have to walk very long, you just walk the time you want to walk. And each step like that can bring you a lot of joy and peace and happiness.

If you want to invite a child from another family or a friend to join your day of mindfulness, please do it. Because you are motivated by the desire to make him or her happy with your mindfulness day. Many, many years ago—I think about twenty-five or thirty years ago—I wrote a little book where I proposed a day of mindfulness every week. A day when we have really the opportunity to practice attention, mindfulness, love, and care to ourselves and to the people we love. I think in the twenty-first century, to hold a day of mindfulness a week is a very civilized thing to do. Not only for the Buddhists, but for everyone. They may not call it a "day of mindfulness," but it must be of the same essence: cultivating peace, cultivating togetherness, cultivating the present moment. It is very important for our happiness.

Before the children go out and play, I would like to remind of them of the practice of visiting the Buddha that I have proposed to children in Holland—they love it. And if the adults want to practice, it's okay also. Visiting the Buddha. The Buddha is within yourself, the real Buddha. The Buddha you see in the garden is a Buddha, but made with plaster, it's not a real Buddha. When you bow to that Buddha, if you bow correctly, you touch the Buddha within. A real Buddha is not made of copper or gold or plaster—a real Buddha is made with mindfulness. Mindfulness carries understanding, peace, and love. So bow to the Buddha in such a way that you touch Buddha inside and you know Buddha is not something abstract, it is your mindfulness.

You have proved to be mindful at times. You are very capable of drinking a glass of milk mindfully. One day I was drinking my milk, very slowly and mindfully. I saw the cow as my adopted mother. I feel very happy to have the chance not to eat my mother. I am vegetarian, and I feel very lucky not to be forced to eat the flesh of my adopted mother. Every time I drive from the Upper Hamlet to the Lower Hamlet, looking at the straw, I see milk in it inside, because a mother cow will eat it and it will become milk. So when I look at the milk I see the straw and when I look at the straw I see milk, I see the water, I see the sky, I see the sunshine, and I practice like that all day. I can see the nature of inter-being in everything, everyone.

This is very wonderful because it reveals to me a wonderful world of interconnection. Trying to look at things like that will reduce all my fear, and discrimination and anger. It is very important, because in Buddhism we speak about liberation from suffering by understanding. The children prove to be able to be compassionate, to be loving, to be calm at times—therefore the Buddha is real inside. There is no doubt. When I make a lotus flower and bow to a child, I say, "A lotus for you, my dear, you who are a Buddha to be." If you want to be a Buddha, you can be a Buddha. A Buddha is someone who is made of mindfulness. You know how to drink a glass of milk mindfully. You know how to walk mindfully or to breathe mindfully. During the time you do so, you touch Buddhahood in you, the Buddha nature in you.

So it's very nice to visit the Buddha within from time to time. You might like to sit down quietly and breathe in and out for a few minutes to calm yourself, and then you ask, "Little Buddha, my little Buddha, are you there?" Ask very deeply; ask the question very deeply and quietly, "My little Buddha, are you there?" In the beginning you might not hear the answer. There is an answer always, but because you are not calm enough, you don't hear the answer. "Anyone there? Little Buddha, are you there?" Then the second time you begin to hear the voice of your little Buddha answering you, "Yes, my dear, of course I am always there for you." When you hear that you smile, "I know. Little Buddha, you are my calm. I know you are always there and I need you, to be calm, from time to time. From time to time I am not calm enough. I scream, I act as if I do not have the Buddha in me. But because I know you are there, I know that I have the capacity of being calm. Thank you little Buddha, you are my calm. I need you to be there." And the little Buddha says, "Of course I'll be there for you all the time. Just come and visit anytime you need." That is the practice of touching the Buddha inside. It's a very important practice. Not only for children, for all of us.

I love to sit close to children because of their freshness. Every time I hold the hand of a child and practice walking meditation, I always profit from the freshness of him or her. I might offer him or her my stability, but I always profit from their freshness. Holding the hand of a child in mindfulness, offering him some stability, offering her some stability, and receiving a lot of freshness—this is what I love to do. You say, "Dear little Buddha, you are my freshness. Thank you for being there." You have confidence because you have been able to be fresh, many times. If you touch the Buddha, the freshness in you continues to grow. the adults, they also practiced like that. "Dear little Buddha, you are my tenderness." Tenderness is what all of us need and children prove to be tender, many times.

"Dear little Buddha, you are my mindfulness," that is true. Because a Buddha is someone that is made of an energy called mindfulness. To be mindful means to be aware of what is going on, and this is only possible when you are really there. If you are really there one hundred percent, you will be aware of what is going on. This is a very crucial practice.

"Dear Buddha, you are my understanding." True, Buddha is the power of understanding. Because if you are there, you are very alert. You know everything that is going on, that is why you understand things and people very easily. So, "Little Buddha, you are my understanding. I need you very much because I know that understanding is the base of love." If you don't understand someone, you cannot love him or her. That is why understanding is so crucial. Cut out: What is meditation? Meditation is s...

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[Begins in mid sentence]

. . .you are not practicing the right kind of meditation. You may be only trying to escape the difficulties and the problems around you or inside of you. "Dear little Buddha, you are my love. You are the capacity of loving." Children, of course, have the capacity to love. If they touch that capacity every day, their love will grow, their capacity of loving will grow, and they are on the way of realizing fully the Buddha within.

So you practice sitting there and you touch these qualities of the Buddha in you. You touch the real Buddha, not the Buddha made of plaster or copper or even emerald. For the practitioner, Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not someone outside in the sky, on a mountain. Buddha is alive, that is a living Buddha that is in us. Tell me of a person who does not possess the nature of Buddha within him or her. No. In Mahayana Buddhism, the most important message of all the sutras is that everyone has the capacity of being a Buddha. The capacity of loving, understanding, and being enlightened. That is the most important message of all sutras.

So this is a very deep practice. You may spend only three or four minutes on this practice. You may like to put your fingers on your heart and you practice visiting the Buddha inside. The Buddha is in your heart, also everywhere in your body, not only in your heart. In your stomach, also. Sometimes you feel that fear is in your stomach, but you should know that the Buddha is in your stomach at the same time. It is up to you to choose.

After a few minutes of practice like that, you practice alone, or together with a few friends. You say, "Dear Buddha, it is very comfortable to know that you are there." The Buddha always says, "Of course I am always there for you. But please visit more often." Because every time you visit the Buddha, the Buddha in you profits. The Buddha in you will have more space and air to breathe. Because during the day you may have suffered a lot and you throw into yourself anger, hatred, frustration, suffering. So you deprive the Buddha of fresh air to breathe inside. So your little Buddha may be suffocating a little bit inside. But every time you practice touching the Buddha, you bring in a lot of space, of air. The Buddha within you has a chance to grow. It is very important. Sitting meditation that is for what? Walking meditation that is for what? That is to give to the Buddha inside a chance to grow.

"Dear little Buddha, I need you very much," and the little Buddha in you will say, "Dear one, I also need you very much. Please come and visit more often." This practice is called recollection of the Buddha and is taught in every school of Buddhism. You touch the Buddha, you touch all the qualities of the Buddha, and you know that the Buddha is absolutely real—not as an idea, not as a notion, but as a reality. Our task, our life, our practice, is to nourish the Buddha and give ourselves and the people we love a chance.

Please write down the practice in short, complete sentences to make it available for other children who are not sitting today in this Dharma hall, so that they can practice with you also. The children should stand up and bow

[Bell—Children leave Dharma hall].

On the sixteenth of this month I started our summer opening with a Dharma talk where I said that it's very important to allow our body and our minds to rest. Our body may still carry a lot of wounds inside, and our consciousness also; it may carry a lot of wounds inside. They need healing. The basic condition for all healing is to be able to rest, but we don't have the capacity to rest. We have the habit of running, of doing things. That is why to meditate is first of all to learn how to rest, to give your body and your mind a chance to rest and to heal themselves. It seems to be a very simple thing, but we need training to be able to do that.

I said that when an animal living in the forest is wounded, it always tries to look for a quiet place to lay down for many days and allow the wound to heal. During these days the animal does not think about eating or anything else. That is the practice of all animals in the forest every time they get wounded by another animal or by other kinds of things, including disease. That wisdom we have to learn. There are wounds within our body. We may have diseases; we may even have cancer or other difficulties that we think to be incurable. We may have blocks of suffering in our consciousness. We may have despair, fear, and confusion, but we know that our body has the capacity of healing itself if we allow it a chance to rest. This is not only true for our body but also for our soul.

Our consciousness knows and has the capacity of healing itself—only if we allow it the chance, that is, to allow it to rest, to authorize it to rest. When we cut our finger we are not so afraid, we know that our body can heal itself. So we just clean the wound, protect it from the dirt, and the battle is from inside and in just twenty-four hours we can heal it. Our body knows how to create antibodies to protect itself. We have to believe in our body. We have to allow our body a chance to rest. Many difficult diseases may be healed just by our capacity of resting. This we have to learn. In the practice of Buddhism there are many things like that to learn. The sutra on mindful breathing, for instance, is more than enough for you to heal yourself. If you know how to practice exercises brought to you by the Buddha, you know how to do it, to enjoy doing that, you give your body a chance to heal and also your consciousness.

You have had the experience of utmost suffering—something happened to you and you did not believe that you could survive that. How could you survive such bad news, pain? And yet, you have survived. You have gone through that period and you've proved to be able to survive that kind of suffering. It means your consciousness knows the way to survive. You say, "Time heals." But time alone cannot heal your suffering. It is not because you are acquainted with the suffering that you are healed. No. It is because of the fact that your consciousness knows the way to heal itself. You have to trust it because in your consciousness there is the Buddha, there is a seat of love, of understanding. If you allow them to manifest, then your consciousness will be able to heal itself.

Talking to a therapist, talking to a teacher, talking to Dharma brothers and sisters, allows these wholesome energies to be touched, to give them a chance to become more apparent. They will take care of the healing. Sometimes we speak about a "talking cure," but the talking cannot cure. The talking—the most it can do—is to allow yourself to have confidence in your own ability to heal yourself. So it's very important that during that time we spend with a Sangha, a Dharma teacher, we have to learn the techniques of allowing our body and our soul to rest. The heart of the Buddhist practice is to stop—to stop running, to stop preventing our body and our soul from resting.

Many people believe that they need to go for holidays. They struggle; they do everything in order to have these holidays. But during these holidays do they really rest? They are much more tired after the holidays. So everyone has to learn the art of resting, of restoring. Your Dharma teachers, your Dharma brothers and sisters, they know how to practice resting and healing. When you practice fasting for instance, you allow your stomach, intestines, liver, kidneys, to rest. You are not afraid of fasting, because you know that there is a reservoir, a reserve, of nutrition in your body. You can go on a fast of two or three weeks without eating and not lose your strength. Those of us who have tried the practice of cleaning our digestive system, we know that. We just drink water. We just rest.

We continue to enjoy our sitting meditation, walking meditation. We don't feel that we lose any energy at all. Our bowels, given time to rest for ten days or two weeks, can heal themselves. We have to believe in such things because we have practiced it and other people have practiced it—it proved to be the truth. Healing is possible only on the days of resting.

Now how about our consciousness, our mind? What kind of practice should you do, or what kind of non-practice should you do in order for your soul and your consciousness to be able to rest? We should not lose our time in getting ideas, even very wonderful ideas, about enlightenment, nirvana, Buddhahood, or things like that. We should

get to the real thing, to the bones of the practice. How to start? With *samatha*. Samatha is just stopping. You stand in front of a young tree. You look at the young tree. You stand in front of the tree in such a way that you can stop. You breathe in and out in such a way that you can stop completely running in your mind and in your body.

Last year when we visited China, we saw on crossroads the sign, "stop." And the Chinese word, "stop," is exactly the word that the Chinese people use to translate the word "samatha." One day I stood in front of a sign like this and I practiced breathing and smiling to it. And I completely stopped. It was like standing in front of the Buddha who made the sign to tell you to stop. You are breathing, you are standing there, but you have stopped completely. It is a wonderful thing to be stopped. With stopping like that, calm becomes something possible. Peace becomes something possible and of course healing. As long as you continue to run—running to look for something or running to escape something—it is still running. You have not stopped you have no peace. So learning how to stop is extremely important. Because stopping, being calm, being peaceful, is the precondition for deep looking, which is *vipasyana*. Vipasyana is insight practice, contemplation, looking deeply. Meditation is made of stopping, calming and looking deeply. Stopping helps you to rest, to calm, to have peace, to provide the basic condition for healing. Then looking is something you can do easily once you have stopped. Looking into the nature of your illness, looking into the nature of your pain, you begin to have the insight you begin to understand. That understanding relieves you from the pain completely. That is called salvation by knowledge. We don't speak about salvation by grace in Buddhism. We speak about salvation by knowledge, by understanding, *prajña*. *Prajñápáramitá* means the kind of understanding that carries you to the other shore, the other shore of no-suffering.

[Bell]

One of the deepest insights that you may try to obtain is the insight on no-self. But no-self is not a theory, a doctrine, a philosophy. No-self is only the insight that has to be touched directly with your practice. As practitioners we should not talk about no-self in such a way that it will have nothing to do with our daily life. I have recommended that all friends who come here to Plum Village during this summer learn and practice the practice of Earth-touching. Touching the Earth is one of the many practices we do in Plum Village in order to touch the nature of our non-self. It is very healing. It heals body and mind. We should practice it every day.

You hold your hands like this [palms together in front of chest] and stand in front of something like a tree, or the blue sky, or a dandelion, or the statue of the Buddha, anything—because everything has the Buddha inside, has the ultimate dimension inside—to bow to anything is fine, to the moon, to the morning star. You produce your true presence, and be there with one hundred percent of yourself. Then you bow down and you touch the earth. Touch the earth with your feet, with your arms, with your forehead. Touch deeply, don't do it halfway. Because this is an act of surrender. Surrender what and surrender to what? This is the act of surrendering the self, the idea of self. Because you think that you are a separate entity that is the basic cause for your suffering. When you touch the earth deeply—the earth may be your mother, your father, your ground of being, yourself—you surrender the idea that you are a separate thing. You smile and you open your palms. The act of opening your palm like this and facing inward, it means that I'm nothing. There is nothing. My intelligence—we're very proud of our intelligence. Our talents. Our diplomas. Our position in society. We may be proud of many things we have or we are, but when we are in that position we smile and we know, we know that all these things have been handed down by our ancestors.

If you have a beautiful voice, don't think that you have created that beautiful voice for yourself. It has been transmitted by your ancestors, your parents. If you have the talent of a painter, don't think that you have invented that talent. It has been transmitted to you as a seed. So everything you have thought that you are has come from the cosmos, from your ancestors. So during the first touching of the earth you link yourself with the cosmos. The water in you, the heat in you, the air in you, the soil in you, belong to the water outside, the soil outside. Without the forest how could you be? Without your father and mother how could you be there this moment? Therefore you say, in wisdom, that you are nothing. Everything that you think, you thought that you are, you have received from the cosmos, from parents—including your body. Suddenly non-self arises as an insight. You belong to the stream of life. If you bear hatred toward your father, you think that your life has been ruined by your father, that you don't want to have anything to do with your father. It is out of ignorance that you have thought so. Because if you touch the reality of no-self, you see very clearly that you are your father. You are just a continuation of your father, and your father is a continuation of your grandfather.

We are one in a stream of life. To think that you are a separate entity, that you are a self that can be independent from your father, is a very funny thing. Because your father is inside you, you can never get rid of him. There is no alternative except to reconcile with your father. To reconcile with him means to reconcile with yourself. You have

a chance to do so now with the practice. The other person, it might not be your father; he may be your brother or your spouse or anyone. You think that he or she has made you suffer so much, has made your life miserable. There is a tendency in you never to see him again, to hear from him again or from her again. That kind of willingness, that kind of feeling is born from your ignorance of the reality of no-self. Because we are all together. Not only are we together, we are inside each other, we inter-are. So during the first act of Touching the Earth you surrender your idea of self, and suddenly you release a lot of suffering, a lot of anger. You give yourself a chance for compassion and understanding to be born in your heart.

When you make a prostration like that you are not invoking a god to come and save you. To save yourself. But it is really a practice of wisdom. You touch the earth in order to release, to let go of your notion of self and to get insight that you belong to the same stream of life, reality. Suddenly you see that it is possible for you to make peace with that person. Making peace with him means making peace with you. Strange, because my peace depends very much on his peace or her peace. If I devote time, energy, to help him, to help her to suffer less, suddenly I have more peace and more happiness. I do not have the intention to do it for me. But I get all the results.

When you see a small insect in danger, you spend half a minute to rescue the insect. You think that you are doing that for its sake, out of your compassion. But while you do that you cultivate the compassion inside you and happiness becomes yours. What does it mean to be compassionate? To me, to be compassionate means to be able to relate to other living beings. When you are able to relate to other living beings your loneliness, your feeling of being cut off, will disappear. So, compassion is for whom—for these living beings or for you? The answer is, for both. Any word, any thought, any act, born from that insight of no-self, brings healing and reconciliation within you and around you. There are friends who have practiced the Five Prostrations and the Three Prostrations who have reported that the practice is very effective, that those who practice just one hour get a big relief, and continue to cry and cry during the first hour of practice. You already know when you practice like that you do not invoke, call upon a god to help you, but you touch reality. You touch understanding. You touch prajña that is able to free you. So stopping, resting, is for healing. Looking deeply, touching the insight of no-self is also for healing, for liberation. That is the essence of Buddhist meditation.

Are you interested in realizing your Buddha nature in you, in suffering, in enlightenment? But, that Buddha nature, that suffering, that enlightenment, do they have anything to do with your suffering, your illness? I would not be interested in Buddha nature, enlightenment, awakening, if these have nothing to do with my suffering, my liberation. I only do the practices that can help me to rest, to heal and to liberate myself.

Our practice should be concrete, effective. We should not allow a practice to go on for a long time without bringing us any relief, any transformation. That would not be an intelligent way of practicing. When a farmer, after having used a certain kind of seeds or fertilizer, or methods of agriculture, does not get the results he wants, he would be intelligent enough to change. Meditators have to be like that. If having tried a certain method for some time they do not feel any change, any transformation, they should inquire again. They should learn again from their teachers, their brothers in the Dharma, their sisters in the Dharma, in order to get the right methods. According to the Buddha, the Dharma is effective right away—if you get the right Dharma, like mindful breathing. The moment when you begin breathing in mindfully you already get the result of such a practice. You get the concentration. You get the stopping. What is the use of breathing in if you cannot stop and rest? If you don't feel more concentrated, why do you have to bother yourself? To suffer because of the practice of breathing in and out, is nonsense. So if you are breathing in and out, and feel concentrated and restful and calm and producing your true presence, you know that the practice is correct and you already enjoy the fruit of the practice.

Walking meditation: Why do we have to walk slowly like that? Why do you have to compose yourself in slowing down like that? It does not look natural. In the beginning, people around the practice center always say, "They don't seem to live in the real world. They like to live in a dream, they walk so slowly." That is a first impression because in the world people always run. They don't know the art of stopping. They don't know the art of living deeply each moment of their life. So when they see a nun or a monk or a lay person walking, looking, smiling like that, they don't feel it's normal. They feel it's abnormal. There's one villager in the New Hamlet, she said she was very, very surprised and shocked when she saw a nun walking slowly who stopped and looked at the garbage. What is the use of looking at the garbage like that for a long time? What is normal and what is abnormal? There are people who have demonstrated that after just a few hours or a few days of staying in Plum Village they begin to like the practice. Because for the first time they know how to stop. To be able to stop is a wonderful thing, because they may have been running for the last 3,000 years.

[Bell]

Please, when you breathe in, do not make an effort of breathing in. You just allow yourself to breathe in. Even if you don't breathe in it will breathe in by itself. So don't say, "My breath, come, so that I tell you how to do." Don't try to force anything, don't try to intervene, just allow the breathing in to take place. What you have to do is be aware of the fact that the breathing in is taking place. And you have more chance to enjoy your in-breath. Don't struggle with your breath that is what I recommend. Realize that your in breath is a wonder. When someone is dead, no matter what we do, the person will not breathe in again. So we are breathing in, that is a wonderful thing. Breathing in I know I'm alive it's a miracle. We have to enjoy our in-breath. There are many ways to enjoy your in-breath. We want you to tell us how you enjoy your in-breath, whether in a sitting position or in a walking position. But if you don't enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you don't do it right.

This is the first recommendation on breathing that the Buddha made. When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly you become entirely present. What a miracle, because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in-breath. So you now understand the two sentences, "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." And a few minutes later, "Breathing in I know my in-breath has become deep. Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slow." That is not an effort to make the in-breath deeper or the out-breath slower. That is only a recognition of the fact. These instructions will be used for our walking meditation right after the Dharma talk. After having followed your in-breath and out-breath for a few minutes you will notice that your in-breath and out-breath now have a much better quality, because the image of mindfulness, when touching anything, increases the quality of that thing. The Buddha when he touches something, reveals and increases the quality of being of that thing. Mindfulness is the Buddha therefore it plays that role.

When you look at the full moon, and if you are mindful, "Breathing in I see the full moon, breathing out I smile at the full moon," suddenly the full moon reveals itself to you maybe one hundred times more clearly. It's more beautiful, it's clearer it's more enjoyable. Why? Because the moon has been touched by mindfulness. So when you touch your in-breath and out-breath with your mindfulness, your in-breath becomes more harmonious, more gentle, deeper, slower, and so does your out-breath. Now you enjoy in-breathing and out-breathing. Naturally your breathing becomes more enjoyable, the quality of your breathing increases. So "In/Out" is for the beginning. [Thây writes on blackboard.] Then "Deep/Slow" is the next step: "Breathing in, I know that my in breath has become deep and I enjoy it. Breathing out, I see that my out-breath has become slow and I enjoy it."

During that time you have stopped, you have allowed your body and your mind to rest. Even if you are walking, you are resting. If you are sitting, you are resting. You are not struggling anymore, on your cushion, or walking. Then later on you will try this. These words are only to help you to recognize what is happening. "Calm/Ease: Breathing in I feel the calm in me." This is not autosuggestion, because if you have enjoyed In/Out and Deep/Slow, calm is something that is established. Resting. If you touched your calm, your calm rose. It's like when you touched the moon. "Breathing out, I feel ease in me." I don't suffer anymore. I will not make it hard anymore. Don't be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to be at ease with yourself. Don't struggle. All of these can be done even if lots of suffering is still in your body and in your soul. Doing this, we are taking care of them. We are not trying to escape the pain in us. We are giving our body and our consciousness a rest.

"Smile/Release: Breathing in I smile." In Plum Village we speak about "mouth yoga," you just try to smile and then you realize the relaxation of the many hundreds of muscles on your face. According to the law of cause and effect when you have joy you smile. Or when you smile you release all the tension on your face. The first case is cause and effect. The second case is also cause and effect. So why do you have to wait for joy to take the initiative? Why don't you allow your mouth to take the initiative? Do you practice some kind of discrimination against your body? You know that the moment when you sit down and rest you feel much better in your soul. So the body can always take the initiative if you allow it to be. And to practice meditation, you don't practice it only with your mind, but also with your body. The Buddha said it is possible to touch nirvana with your body.

"Breathing in, I smile," because there is calm, ease, and the joy of being rested. And "breathing out, I release." I release because there is in me a tendency to continue to run, to struggle. Even in my dream I continue to struggle—that is a habit energy of more than three, four thousand years. I recognize it. It has been transmitted to me by many generations of ancestors. So now I'm practicing for them. If I can stop and release, then all my ancestors in me get

liberated. You are doing it for everyone, because you are not a self. And you are doing it out of love.

The last is, "Present moment/Wonderful moment." To be walking on earth and realizing that you are alive, dwelling in the present moment. You see, to be alive and to be walking on earth is already a miracle. Because you have been running to look for your happiness, you may not know that happiness is available in the here, and the now. Conditions for your happiness may be more than enough in the here and the now. That is the result of the practice of stopping—stopping to realize that you are wonderful like this. You can be happy right now.

"Present moment," because that is the only moment for us to live. If you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. "Wonderful moment," that is life that you touch. Suddenly happiness becomes possible. Being alive, walking with the Sangha, touching the blue sky, the earth, breathing in and out freely, allowing us to rest body and consciousness is already a wonderful thing. Do we need a deeper practice? A more difficult practice? More complicated kind of practice? I don't think so. Because for those of us who have practiced forty, fifty years already, we continue to practice like this or something similar to this, and we always get more peace and joy and happiness. Our insight always continues to grow. You don't have to look for an "intensive" course of meditation, or a "high" level of meditation, or "intensive" or "high" practice. Lin-Chi, the founder of the Rinzai School of meditation, said, "The miracle is not to walk on fire or on thin air, the miracle is to walk on earth." If mindfulness is there, you are performing the miracle of being alive in each moment.

So please, my friends, now it is time for us to enjoy walking together. When you hear the bell, enjoy your in-breath and out-breath. We will take time to enjoy also going to the bathroom. After that we gather around the linden tree. We start walking together. Walking meditation, I consider it to be an act of life-celebrating. To walk together as a Sangha, enjoying every step we make, feeling alive, is really the celebration of life. Don't consider it to be hard or hard practice.